

SPORTS AND RECREATION COMMITTEE meeting of March 22, 2000

A regular meeting of the Sports and Recreation Committee was held at the H. Lee Dennison Building, Veterans Memorial Highway, Hauppauge, New York on March 22, 2000 at 2:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Legislator Joseph Caracappa, Chairman
Legislator Ginny Fields, Vice Chair
Legislator Cameron Alden
Legislator Vivian Fisher

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Legislator David Bishop, Legislative District No. 14
Gail Vizzini, Budget Review Office
Christopher Nuzzi, County Executive's Office

Minutes Taken By:

Kimberly Castiglione, Legislative Secretary

(The meeting was called to order at 2:55 p.m.)

CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:

We have one resolution before us. The public hearing has been closed. It is IR 1200.

I.R. 1200-2000 A LOCAL LAW ESTABLISHING SPECIAL SPORTS SCORE JETS COMMITTEE TO BRING NEW YORK JETS TO LONG ISLAND. (Caracappa)

I will make a motion to approve.

LEGISLATOR BISHOP:

I just want to get a feeling of what the parameters are of what is being authorized by this.

CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:

The question is basically what does the resolution do. My goal in this resolution is to put together a task force to look at the options that we have here in Suffolk County, to maybe lure the New York Jets, as we well know are looking for a new home, to the County of Suffolk. I know probably what you are leading into and what is on some people's minds relating to this resolution and this initiative as a whole, is this committee being put together to see how we can fund this with taxpayer dollars. Absolutely not. I will get back to your question, I just want to lead out of it for a second. I just want to rule that out right away.

What we are trying to do is just show the New York Jets through a committee of experts that Suffolk County is probably one of the best places they can consider if they do decide to change residence and come back to Long Island where they are originally from. I personally think the Jets belong here in Suffolk County. Anything that we can do to craft a proposal, to sit down with Mr. Johnson, the owner of the Jets, would be a plus, I think, to Suffolk County. And if we could do this in a way that it works for everyone involved, whether it be – well, first and foremost the residents of Suffolk County, the government of Suffolk County, if we can deal with traffic issues, we can deal with the environment, we can deal with alternative transportation issues, everything associated with bringing a project or doing this sort of endeavor here in Suffolk County. If we can just get together, see if it is feasible, and if it is, go to the Jets and say, "Mr. Johnson, here is our proposal. We are a great place for you to make your new home and we are interested." So this is basically what it does.

LEGISLATOR FISHER:

I have another question. I'm sorry, go ahead.

CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:

Legislator Bishop.

LEGISLATOR BISHOP:

So the committee has no authority to do anything other than present options back to the Legislature. They don't have negotiating ability.

CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:

Correct. We will come up with a plan, basically a selling point that we think is a strategy for us in Suffolk, and we will come back with a report for the Legislature and for the Executive. Then the Legislature will have final say as if we want to even engage the Jets at that point, but it will be a report, a detailed report, showing all the great aspects that we in Suffolk County hold. We all know, the Legislators, that we are doing very well and that is the point I am trying to make. If we can gather these businessmen and environmentalists and traffic experts and come up with a conclusion that yes, this can be done, and Legislature, what do you think, should we go for it, and that is basically what I am trying to do.

I know it is a big concept, it is a long-shot in some instances, but it is a long-shot for everybody. You may have read that quote in the paper. It is a long-shot for anybody thinking about getting the Jets at this point into their municipality, and I think it is worth our effort, worth a little bit of money to at least explore it and you never know what could happen.

LEGISLATOR BISHOP:

You may know that at one time I was a vendor at Shea Stadium and worked Jet games for a number of years. My heart would tell me to return the Jets to their natural home at Shea Stadium. However, understanding the reality of sports franchise locations as I do, I would say in that in theory that the Jets would not cost taxpayers dollars, would not have a negative impact on the environment, all the ill concerns are addressed and the Jets wanted to come back to Long Island where their fan base is, then I wouldn't want to stand in the way of that, if those other concerns were addressed. So this is just a first step, it is information gathering. I have no opposition to information. I have a long record of supporting initiatives that gain information for the Legislature.

CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:

Thank you.

LEGISLATOR FISHER:

My question, actually what Dave just said, it is a perfect segue into my question which is you've discussed a selling point, and I want to make sure that when we see this report that we are not simply selling ourselves to the Jets, but that what this committee will do is to sell itself to the people of the Suffolk County that it won't cost the taxpayer a great deal of money. We discussed the article in which it was pointed out that it is generally economically not positive in terms of a municipality housing a major league support system. I want to be certain that this committee knows that it is not only selling us to the Jets, but it is selling the idea of being a future home for the Jets to the people of Suffolk County.

CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:

That is absolutely correct. When you bring up the article, I guess you are bringing up Bob Weaver's editorial on how stadiums cost municipalities tens of millions, sometimes hundreds of millions of dollars in taxes that they have accrued through a bond or whatever the situation may have been in that region. That is true in some instances, but in other instances it hasn't been true. They have only picked out of course the ones that are glaring, and in some instances they have worked, but that is another issue that we are not even going to explore, and that is doing a – what would potentially be a 500 to \$700 million stadium for the Jets to play in through taxpayer dollars. That is non-realistic. It is both financial suicide and political suicide all in one breath, so that is not what the goal of what this committee will be. It will be to look at outside funding, it will be to look at things I mentioned before, traffic, environment, location, feelings of the Suffolk County residents, and is this possible, is it feasible, should we even entertain the idea of moving forward to trying to get the Jets to the table and say Suffolk County is a great place for you to relocate.

And if you look across the country, other than subsidizing the National Football League or National Hockey League, whatever municipalities are doing across the country, what leagues are doing, professional leagues such as the NFL or NHL, they are moving them out of the cities and into the suburbs because they are trying to draw that kind of fan. Do you know what I mean, David? Like in the National Football League you have Rich Stadium in Buffalo outside the city, Foxborough Stadium outside the city. You have in Washington Jack Ken Cook Stadium moving further away from the metropolis, if you will. And it seems to be in their best interest and in the community's best interest because a team in a stadium – what they are trying to achieve, and I know I am jumping around here, is some sort of home, some sort of community type of feeling where it will stay forever and ever.

Besides the Ducks we have here now and the stadium, and some of you came on a tour earlier a couple of hours ago at the ballpark, it is exciting and you get the feeling it is your home team. It is a special feeling I really can't talk about in words. But getting off the point a little bit, the point is we should at least explore and maybe this could happen and maybe the Jets will realize that Suffolk County is that suburban heaven that they are looking to to forge this sort of long term relationship with the residents to bring the Jets here and to have that community feeling amongst a municipality and a professional sports franchise. I may be getting romantic with it, but I am romantic with the sports notion, and it works in some instances and we put this committee together to explore it.

I don't want to hide anything from any of you either. It does consist of a \$20,000 cost associated to the committee, which we may or may not use. The offset is our own 456 account, which has been budgeted for a whole host of things. One of them was the LILCO/LIPA, extensive LILCO/LIPA litigation that was ongoing. Seeing that ongoing litigation is not ongoing at this point, we have freed up a tremendous amount of money, of revenue, that can be used as an offset for our

own 456 account. So, that is where we are getting it from. It is a \$20,000 ceiling, there is a ceiling on it, and we may not even have to use it, but it is good to know that we can use it to do some research that would be necessary in making this happen.

LEGISLATOR FIELDS:

I will second your motion.

(Vote: 4/0/0/0)

CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:

That was the only resolution on the agenda. This was probably the longest meeting we've had in Sports and Recreation. The rest were 30 seconds long. Is there any other business to come before this committee?

LEGISLATOR BISHOP:

How about bringing the Yankees?

CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:

I figured I would try and get the Rangers now that they are trying to move and look for a new home, Suffolk Square Garden has a nice ring to it. Maybe we will bring the Yankees, too. Anybody that is a professional sports team I am going to try and get.

Seriously, this is a unique situation, and I think it is the worth the time and effort to look into it. This committee is now adjourned. Thank you.

(The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 p.m.)